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Brzezinski Remark May Have Tipped Soviets to U.S. Monitoring Ability

By Fred S. Hoffman
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U.S. intelligence specialists are concerned that a remark by President Carter's national security adviser may have given the Russians a clue to the effectiveness of U.S. monitoring of Soviet air defenses.

They fear this may have been a result of Zbigniew Brzezinski's disclosure to newsmen Friday that Soviet jet fighters had fired on a South Korean airliner well inside Russian territory.

At the time Brzezinski said this, the Russians had acknowledged that their fighter planes had intercepted the airliner. But they were silent about any shooting.

IT WASN'T UNTIL more than a day later, after they reached Helsinki, Finland, that survivors confirmed the Soviet attack.

Therefore, it became clear that Brzezinski obtained his information about the shooting through U.S. intelligence monitoring of Soviet communications and a "reading" of Russian pilot radio talk.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union use a variety of highly sophisticated intelligence-gathering electronic devices from satellites, ships, submarines, airplanes and land bases.

While each government knows the other is doing this, intelligence officials are extremely close-mouthed on what kind of methods they use in sensitive situations, and what kind of results they achieve.

These officials contend that public disclosure of methods and results is likely to tell the Russians much about the effectiveness of U.S. intelligence.

This could lead to Soviet countermeasures, the specialists say.

Defense officials did say that no radio distress message was received from the Korean plane and no radio call was sent to it from U.S. sources. They did not elaborate.

THERE ARE INDICATIONS that Norwegian radar detected that the South Korean airliner had entered the Soviet air space, and that this information was relayed to U.S. officials.

Sources at the U.S.-Canadian North American Air Defense Command headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colo., said the Korean plane was about 1,000 miles outside the range of the Distant Early Warning radar line.

That line across Canada has been on guard for many years against a possible Soviet bomber attack over a polar region. It reaches out about 350 to 400 miles, NORAD officials said, and would give U.S. air defense pilots "plenty of warning time to scramble, if necessary."

But NORAD officials said these stations would not "see" aircraft in that area.

As for the violent Soviet reaction, U.S. intelligence officials said they were not surprised the Russians would be sensitive about an air intrusion into the Kola peninsula region.

There are at least five Soviet bases there, including home ports for Russia's latest missile-firing boats, which the Russian navy tries to keep away from Western eyes.

The Kola inlet also is the anchorage for major Soviet surface warships. And Russia's northern fleet air force of some 280 planes is deployed in that area.